Between a Rock and a Small Space

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Between a Rock and a Small Space

by Pollyannam3

Summary

"The house was so large and there were so many of them: what would one little prank do? Turn into prank after prank after prank, that's what.
And sometimes: pranks should not involve easter eggs, an upstairs closet and a "2 ton" toolbox."

Notes

This came out much longer than I expected it to!! Aghhh!! I hope you enjoy this!

Based very heavily on this post (https://epitheterasedgen.tumblr.com/post/624729835327160320/because-you-wrote-the-script-for-epithet-switched) by well, "epitheterasedgen" on Tumblr! Very good stuff, very much enjoyed it!!

This fic is just me having big Giovanni feels and I'm here for it.

Living in a strange found family of Nine was...strange. Especially when "I beat you up and attempted to kill you" was a mutual sentiment for a couple of them.

But here they all were! Living under a single roof and everything! And they were happy! Or, well, as happy as they could be in such a ..vast home.

The house was so large and there were so many of them: what would one little prank do?

Turn into prank after prank after prank, that's what.

And sometimes: pranks should not involve easter eggs, an upstairs closet and a "2 ton" toolbox.

That's when Giovanni kicked an easter egg when not paying attention. He raised an eyebrow and put down his small box of yarn. Evidently, he was planning to go sit in front of a window and knit in the good sunlight before it got too dark or close to dinner time.

He picked up the egg before it could roll too far away and he was surprised to hear it rattle a little bit. He opened it to see 3 plain M&M's inside and his eyes sparkled. "Sick!! Absolute score!" He wasted no time enjoying the treat, and tossed the empty egg into his box of yarn.

He was just going to write this off as random nonsense but he spotted several more eggs leading up the stairs. He stared at them for a second.

"These eggs on the stairs are a GIANT safety hazard! Someone could trip and break their whole entire face!" Giovanni stepped up a single step and grabbed one of the eggs of danger, eyeing it suspiciously.

"I *guess* I'll have to take all of them and split the earnings!" Giovanni smiled to himself, and started picking the eggs up and putting them into the yarn box. Each of them rattled and each rattle made him beam in excitement.

He couldn't wait to see Molly's face when he presents at least a pack worth of M&Ms to her in colorful egg form!

Maybe Sylvie can get in on it too! If Giovanni was feeling extra generous. He would have to hide it from Percy because she doesn't like it when the kids snack before dinner time.

The eggs led down the hallway in a trail, Giovanni picked up all of them. He barely even realized where he was being led to, all he cared about was getting that happy "Whoa!!" from his favorite (and only!) little sister!

He moved along the trail until he couldn't walk any further. He grabbed the last egg on the floor of the open upstairs closet and beamed as he put it with his humble collection.

All he could do was drop the box in alarm when the door slammed shut behind him. "Huh?"

Outside the door, he could hear the scuff of something *HEAVY* moving and a huff.

He gasped and immediately started trying to open the door. He twisted the handle and tried to push but the door barely budged. Laughter rang from the other side.

“MAN! Like taking candy from a pink haired baby!” A southern drawl cackled at her own actions.

“ZORA!!” Giovanni’s anger rushed faster than Zora had ever heard before. “HE-HEY HEY!! I STILL HAVE THE CANDY SO!! HA!!!” Zora kept laughing as Giovanni kept trying to open the door, but only getting short bangs against the toolbox.

“Good *luck* trying to push past Howie’s toolbox, beandip! That thing weighs like! Twice as ya! Maybe even three times!”

“Zora LET ME OUT!!” He jiggled the door handle frantically and angrily to show he meant business. Zora snorted, shaking her head even though Giovanni was unable to see. “I intend to! In a couple some-odd hours. This oughta make up for the time you put a flower in mah gun trying to make it do the clown thing but just JAMMING it instead!”

“IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A PRANK!”

“Welp: hope the medicine’s tasty! See ya, breadstick.” Zora ignored Giovanni’s screams to be let out, started whistling and walked away.

“ZORA YOU STINKING, CLOWN, COWBOY ASSHOLE!!” Giovanni looked behind him at the wall. He could barely stand up straight in this closet and the walls were so close.

Too close, far too close. He jiggled the handle and pushed at the door more, but his efforts bore no fruit. With a scream, he kicked the door as hard as he could out of frustration.

“OW!” He stumbled back, clutching his foot. His back hit the wall almost instantly, making his heart drop. “Ah…” He put his hand against the wall, hesitantly putting his aching foot on the floor.

“...no no no no NO..ZORA GET BACK HERE AND LET ME OUT!!” He yelled towards the door, pressing against the wall like that would help any. “ZORA!” He knocked against the door, trying to elicit ANY response.

He tried to focus on the door instead of the walls, but the air felt so *thick* . It made him feel warm and near tears. His heartbeat was fast and he could only call out for Zora and make causal threats to her kneecaps.

“Zora, I swear to god!!! I *know* you’re still there!!! You have to still be there to mess with me!!!” He banged on the door again, trying to ignore his body beginning to tremble uncontrollably.

“Let me out!! Let! Me! Out!” He yelled loudly. He was breathing heavily and he couldn’t catch his breath. Tears welled in his eyes. The closet was dark and the only light was coming from the crack under the door that cast a shadow on the ground. He flapped his other hand while using the other to knock as repeatedly as the stim.

“Zora!”

“Giovanni?” A different voice approached the closet door, making Giovanni breathe a harsh relieved breath.

“Sylvie!!!” Giovanni called, trying to control the waver in his voice. He took a big deep breath, and put on his best “everything is fine and normal and I am Great” voice.

“Just the nerd I wanted to see!! Say, let me out and then together, we're gonna go punch Zora's lights out! Whaddya say?" Giovanni sighed, as if Sylvie was already pushing the box away.

Instead, the boy laughed as well. “Ha! As if! Did she do this? Prank you that hard?”

“THE M&M’S WERE TEMPTING, OKAY?!”

“She lured you with *candy?!* You’re joking with me!” Sylvie snorted, covering his mouth and laughing for way longer than Giovanni thought necessary.

“Oh my god, Sylvie!! Shut UP!!” Giovanni groaned, rolling his eyes and pressing his forehead against the door. "Stop being a jerk and let me out!" Sylvie got to hear him knock against the door a couple more times. "You know, Giovanni..."

Oh god, Giovanni hated that tone. That was the "I'm thinking of revenge" tone.

“I get a feeling you’re locked in here for a reason.” He could hear Sylvie take a step forward and the noise of a foot on a toolbox. He was *taunting* him. Like a sheep herding a dog.

“...Yeah, I pissed off Zora with a prank but *but! I can’t be in here!* Come on, Sylvie, open the goddamn door!” Another smack against the door.

Giovanni could just *tell* Sylvie was making his glasses do the dorky glow thing. “Well, I feel like you can!” Giovanni’s heart started beating way faster.

“Do you think I don’t remember all of the pranks you’ve pulled on me this week *alone?* I remember the time earlier in the week when you put salt in my coffee when I wasn’t looking! Or how about all the times you hid my glasses while I was in the shower! You may have only moved them to the medicine cabinet and left it open, but it still scared me! And do *not* get me started on the toothpaste oreos…” Sylvie tapped the door enough for Giovanni to be able to hear it.

“So, if I am a good and honest doctor, I’d have to say that you deserve this and should serve your sentence.”

Giovanni tried to ignore his breath quickening, and shook his head. “Sylvie. Listen to me. I will *never* prank you *ever again* if you just open the door.” Giovanni tried to bribe, but Sylvie just tsked him.

“I’m no gullible loon, Giovanni. I know you’ll leave me alone for like a single day and go back to it!” Giovanni heard Sylvie kick the toolbox back a little bit, only shoving it further

into the door.

Giovanni felt his ears heat up, and the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. “Y-You can’t just leave me here, Syl!! Come *on!!”* Giovanni suppressed a hiccup, trying not to sound desperate.

“Oh, I’ll come back for you. Maybe in half an hour...maybe for dinner time. Who knows!” Giovanni heard the thunk of the toolbox getting tapped, likely Sylvie trying to move it to block him in better.

“Plus, I can *barely* move this thing, sorrryyy!~” Sylvie laughed, putting his hands in his pockets.

“Sylvie! Sylvie, come back!!” Giovanni yelled as he heard Sylvie’s voice become distant, until there was nothing but quiet. “YOU CAN SO MOVE THIS THING, YOU HAVE BEEFTON!! SYLVIE!!” Giovanni banged on the door a couple more times until it was really starting to hurt his hand.

"OH YOU *SO* JUST LOST YOUR CUT OF THESE M&MS!!! I WAS GONNA SPLIT EM WITH YOU AND BEARTRAP BUT YOU MISSED OUT!! LET ME OUT!!!" So as burning tears started to fall down his face, he used his shoulder and what little room he had to bang his entire body against the door. “Hhh!!” He gasped, when that did little but hurt like hell.

He pressed his hand against the door and looked around for anything he could use to bat his way out of here.

His box of yarn, with two knitting needles and candy.

Old coat hangers, thankfully shoved where they would not be in his face.

Dust.

And...that's it.

He didn’t even have his *phone.*

All Giovanni could do was press his back against the door, patting it. “Come on...Zora! Sylvie! This isn’t funny!! Come onnn!! Let me out!! *Let me out!* ” He looked back and forth between the corners and if he wanted to, he could extend his foot and touch the wall without even bending his leg all the way.

It was that small.

He was trapped and he was going to be here...for hours. In this tiny, hot, little closet. Where the walls would slowly sink in around him and crush him from the inside.

And he couldn't get out. No matter how many hits to the door, or how much force he applied, it wouldn't budge. Nothing would open it. He'd be stuck for hours. All by himself, in the dark closet.

Trapped.

Forever.

No, no. That was wrong. It wouldn’t be forever.

Rationality, however, didn’t take kindly to the fearful.

Giovanni was frozen with terror, fear taking hold of his heart, his throat, his hands; he couldn't think straight anymore.

The next thing he knew, he was sitting on the floor against the door. His hands held his head as his heart throbbed in his chest.

“Oh my god…” Giovanni whimpered. He was trembling violently, his whole body shivering and sweat beading on his forehead. His knees were drawn up, hugging his body tight. He was hyperventilating now, and his whole body was shaking so hard. He rapidly looked around a little bit before his eyes squeezed shut, trying to hold back his sobs. “No no no…” He shook his head.

Giovanni couldn’t stop the shaking. He couldn't think about the candy, or the treats or even knitting. He couldn't breathe as it felt like the room was closing in on him.

And finally, he couldn't stand to listen to the quiet closet ambiance anymore.

The panic attack was fully setting in. He couldn't think.

Everything was happening too quickly. *He couldn't think.* His heart was racing, beating like crazy, almost painful. Every breath he drew in was shaky and shallow. His thoughts were swirling around, and every part of his body felt paralyzed at the same time.

His head was spinning, pounding and screaming at the sides.

His face was red and his eyes stung.

His ears burned, and the tears wouldn't stop streaming down his cheeks. Each of these feelings compounded on each other and all he could do was try to make himself fit if he couldn't make himself free.

"...pleaseee..." He sobbed, scared. "...let me outtt… *let me out...* "

Giovanni's voice sounded cracked and weak, as if he were choking and crying simultaneously. He hated the feeling of pressure around his entire body, only broken up by the shaking. He could only clutch his head in his palms, trying to ease himself in any way.

The darkness around him began to close in, squeezing tighter every second. He could still smell the earthy scent of the closet, but everything else felt suffocating. Absolutely no ventilation, of course the stale air around him was thick. The weight of his own fear. It crushed down on him as his head became heavier and heavier until it completely blocked out all other sounds around him.

He didn't even notice the sound of someone attempting to pull the box away. Nor the tiny steps that dashed off once the attempt failed.

“Mr. Honeyglow!” Howie seemingly ignored the call of his name, not looking up from tightening a bolt on a backyard swing set. He was building it for the kids, but he added four swings because he knew several of the more grown folks in the house would want a spin.

“You caught me at a good time, Molly. I just finished this job.” Despite his words, Howie was looking over his work for, well, more work.

"Oh wow...it looks nice! A really neat shade of green and yellow!"

"Painted it myself. There's a bee on the seats. Not a real bee." He looked down at her. "That'd be terrible for the bees."

"Amen." Molly nodded before remembering why she ran outside in the first place. "Ah! Mr. Honeyglow, Giovanni needs your help!"

"Uh-hm?"

Molly waved her arms up and pointed toward the house. "He's stuck in the upstairs closet and I think something's wrong!" Her voice wavered a bit out of fear for her brother.

Howie raised an eyebrow at that statement. "Ain't Percy home? It's usually her wrangling that boy outta trouble."

"Well uh. She is but-I wanted to get you because the box blocking the door has your name...and bees on it. I can't lift it and I don't think Percy could either...no offense to her."

"'Sure none's taken." Howie crossed his arms, an annoyed look on his face. "I knew I was missing my second tool box somewhere. Guess that's what happens when you have too many of the same thing."

"They trap teenage boys in closets?"

"No."

"Ah. Well- let's go help him aaa-" Molly grabbed Howie by the hand and started leading him inside. He didn't interrupt her cause it wasn't his job to be rude toward concerned little cubs.

Giovanni had gone pretty much quiet by this point. He resigned himself to the fate he'd be stuck forever, even if it hadn't been longer than 10 minutes.

He couldn't tell, curled up and still trembling. He could only move to the corner of the closet and put his head in his knees to try and ignore the walls' crushing closeness. Made his teeth

chatter. Made his teeth ache. (Well, not really, it was a wisdom tooth that's been there for a while but he's too scared to care.)

He was going to be here forever: because he put a flower in a gun. Waste of a flower. Could've been put in a nice cup of tea! Could have been given to ANY of his mother figures! But no!

It had gotten him trapped in a closet by an angry cowboy.

These thoughts made small sobs come up his throat and he curled tighter, feeling ill.

He wanted someone to hear it but he had no energy to be loud anymore.

He just wanted out.

"Right here?" Came muffled through the door, but it was fuzzy to the man.

"Yeah!" A second voice came closer as a loud "kch-chunk!" drew Giovanni's attention. He was still shaking but he looked up in surprise when the door opened. Molly and Howie stared at the lanky cowering boy in surprise.

“Giovanni...Are you alright?” Molly asked, reaching a hand into the closet for him.

Giovanni immediately sniffed, wiping his nose on his sleeve. “Ah! Ack-y-yeah!” He looked up at Molly, struggling to process what was going on anymore.

“Are you sure…? You look scared- and tense.” Molly tilted her head as Giovanni uncurled and straightened. “Scared? No- I’m not- I-” Giovanni still had some tears in his eyes. They fell when he tried to smile, but he could barely manage that.

“Move-” He shifted to be able to push himself off the floor and nudged Molly out of the doorway so he could get out. He immediately leaned against the wall once he was out and took a deep relieved sigh, heart still beating way too fast. “I am-” He took deep breaths but struggled to do it properly.

“A *fearless* leader-” He tried to lie and quit leaning on the wall to strike a pose, but his legs felt like jello.

Howie held the toolbox with only a few fingers and spoke with only flecks of Howie-level concern. Definitely there, but quiet, with his free hand ready to grab his arm. “Don’t hurl on the new hardwood, kid.” He said as Giovanni looked like he was about to sway.

“Yea-Jury’s out on that...one-” Giovanni’s head spun as he covered his mouth, throwing up in his mouth a little bit. Howie put the toolbox down to grab Giovanni by the fluff of his jacket to straighten him and Molly grabbed Giovanni’s other arm to create a helpful support.

“Deep breaths, Gio-” Molly said, while Howie gave his back a firm pat. Giovanni straightened himself again, trying to breathe.

“I’m fine- I’m *fine- I*... ” Giovanni suddenly closed his eyes, still swaying but in a less struggling sort of manner.

“Giovanni?” Howie kept a grip on the fluff, like Giovanni was a stressed cat. The teen blinked while Molly interlaced her fingers with his. Almost...dumbly. Howie looked down at Molly, confused.

“I’m dumbing down his fear...I think I should take him to his room for a lil bit. To sit down, y’know?” She said, moving to take on fully supporting her brother.

“I see...You go on ahead and do that, little bee.” Howie let Giovanni’s scruff go, having half a mind to help again when the boy stumbled. Molly held his arm tight though, and led him off. Wobbly but surviving.

Howie looked at his toolbox and wondered how it got jammed in front of the door in the first place. He looked at the closet, and peeked inside. He saw Giovanni’s box of yarn and easter eggs and hummed. He shut the closet door and that's when he noticed a couple strands of hair and grabbed them.

Long and brown. Oh HELL no, she *didn’t.* Anger welled up in his heart, but he took a deep breath and let it out like steam in a honeyed pot.

He’d have a chat with Giovanni later. *Before* giving someone some just desserts.

“I got you, this way. You got it, boss!”

“Mmm…”

Molly steadily guided Giovanni down the hallway towards his bedroom. She didn’t know he had claustrophobia and she wished she had heard him sooner. She felt bad for him, but knew that he was Giovanni Potage! So he’d take a nap and shake this off before someone could say “Soup’s on!”

For right now, she didn’t blame him for not having shaken yet. He was too shooken up to shake right now. Last thing they needed was the can to explode.

Giovanni had his free arm around his stomach and he seemed to be half-awake. Molly wasn’t using the full extent of her epithet to calm him, he was just that tired from the experience.

“We’re almost there, okay? You’re okay.” She reassured him, patting his back really fast before going back to holding his arm.

“Mhm…”

They passed Sylvie’s door as she was saying this, making him open his door in confusion. He saw Molly walking with a stumbly Giovanni and had to ask.

“Wait- what’s up with him-?”

Molly looked at him as they stopped in front of Giovanni's door. She cast Silence around Giovanni so he couldn't hear her talk to Sylvie. Last thing she wanted to do was aggravate him.

"I think he has Claustrophobia." She whispered to him regardless. "He was stuck in that closet over there for who knows how long…" She hooked her arm around his to point at the closet.

Guilt slammed against Sylvie's psyche. He taunted a man having a panic attack when he himself should've been able to *tell.*

"O-oh...My. That does not sound like it was much fun."

"Tell me about it...Can you open this door?" She asked, and Sylvie immediately obliged.

Molly dispelled her epithet entirely as she could lead Giovanni to sit on his bed. Sylvie stood in the doorway, trying to hide out of shame.

"How're you feeling, Gio?" She asked calmly while Giovanni came back to his senses. He shook his head, putting one hand against it.

"Absolutely *tired*... "

"Figured…" Molly didn't have to say much else before Giovanni flopped face first on his bed, taking deep breaths and enjoying the open space. Molly looked around for something, and found one of Giovanni's prized plushies on the ground. She picked up the bear and put it next to him for him to hold onto.

"Take a rest, Gio. I'll get you some water, or something- Be right back." Molly held her hands out before giving him some space.

"Thanks, beartrap…" She heard him mutter, as he grabbed the plush and turned away. "...worst prank ever…"

She didn't know what he meant by that and figured he needed the nap after all...

Molly gave Sylvie a thumbs up as she exited the room and made her way to the stairs. He copied her, but could only shut Giovanni's door because of his own guilt.

If he looked at Giovanni any longer, he might have gone in and apologized too soon. He didn't want to draw Giovanni out of his forming state of calm. He wanted to let him have the space as well.

Sylvie sighed. He hurt BOTH his siblings with their biggest fears. He couldn't believe himself.

Maybe he'd buy Giovanni one of those share sized bags of M&M's as an apology.

Molly sighed as she made her way into the kitchen for some water. Maybe a snack? For herself, Giovanni looked like he felt nauseous.

Indus and Percy were chatting amongst each other, while Indus was setting up a cutting board. Percy's head was in the fridge, as if she was searching for something.

He spotted Molly's approach and beamed at her. "Ah! Miss Bodyguard! How- what is the matter?" Indus's cheerful greeting was cut short with concern.

"Oh it's...Giovanni. He's not feeling too good.." Molly sighed again, grabbing her stool to get a glass out of the allotted cabinet.

"What happened?" Indus asked while Percy silently tensed. He grabbed the cutting board and held it up. “I thought young Giovanni would assist me in preparing dinner tonight! We planned to make vegetarian chili and delightful corned bread! But if he’s feeling ill, I will be happy to make him something else.”

Molly rubbed her arm, looking down. “I don't think he’s Sick-sick, just...someone uh. Locked him in the closet (as a prank?) and he got scared and probably had a panic attack…” She grabbed the glass and went to the sink to fill it with cold tap water.

Indus hummed at this and Percy grabbed an apple to pretend to inspect. In reality she was listening intently. Detective-ly.

“I see...I did not know Giovanni was afraid of closets!” Indus closed his fist, concerned for his friend.

Molly gave Indus a nervous chuckle. “No, no, I think he has claustrophobia, Indus.” Indus thought about this for a couple seconds, before putting his hand on his chin.

“Oh...the fear of Santa Claus...If I remember correctly we *did* store old ornaments in there until we found the attic! We must have missed some. Give Brave Giovanni my greatest apologies, small bodyguard." Indus dramatically bowed his head, almost hitting himself with the cutting board.

“Oh, Indus...Okay, I will…” Molly sighed, walking to the fridge. “Percy, may I get some ice please?”

Percy tossed the apple back into the fridge, slammed the fridge door and opened the freezer. She grabbed some ice cubes and put them into Molly’s cup.

“Oh, thank you.” Molly started to walk off, but Percy stopped her with a gentle hand. “Please, allow me. I wish to speak with Giovanni for a moment.”

“O-oh, alright, but he might be too tired for it!”

“That is a risk I am willing to, say, “gamble” upon.” Percy took the chilled glass with a wink and gave Molly a pat on the head.

“Thank you, dear. Do not actually gamble, it can be quite troublesome, addicting and dangerous, especially at your age.”

“No problem-” Molly hummed as Percy left the room swiftly to go check on Giovanni. Indus knelt next to Molly and asked.

“Would you like to help me make the Chili? I can’t remember where the can opener is. Nor all the vegetables.”

Molly sighed once more, but gave Indus a little smile. “Okay.”

Percy took a deep breath when she got upstairs. Genuine concern was wracking her heart and she wished to make sure Giovanni was feeling alright after such a scare. She’s dealt with criminals panicking when she’s placed them under arrest, de-escalation was literally her job.

This was a little different, but she wanted to try to help.

She hoped to bring even a little comfort to Giovanni with words of reassurance and a refreshment. Always worked on victims of crimes she’s helped.

She knocked on Giovanni’s door, already placing her hand on the handle. “Giovanni?” She didn’t hear anything.

“I hope I’m not waking you: but I would very much like to speak with you about your distress from earlier.”

She waited a few beats without a response. “Are you sleeping? I do not want to intrude on your private space but I can still give you my presence in case you need some assurance: it is no trouble if you are indeed asleep. I would just like to be here for you in a time of need.”

She didn’t receive any response. Just silence.

She pushed the door open slowly, trying to not wake him up as she peeked inside. She spotted him lying down on his bed, curled into a ball facing away from the entrance of his room.

He wasn’t asleep, that Percy could clearly tell.

She hesitated for a moment but walked in regardless. She found herself sitting at the foot of his bed, making him shift and look up a little bit.

“I’m worried for you right now, Giovanni.” Percy said, openly. Giovanni slowly sat up, wiping one of his eyes and tried to discreetly drop his plush off the bed so Percy wouldn't see him snuggling with it. She did and she never minded.

“Yeah?” Percy handed him the glass of water. “Oh, thanks.”

“Molly spoke about you getting “pranked” in a way that caused you a sort of harm. I just wanted to know if you were alright after such a thing. I would also like to know who is the

tomfoolish “prank offender” this time.”

Giovanni took a sip of the water and sighed. Of course she would tell Percy, he almost fell on his face out of fear.

He put his glass on his nightstand and crossed his legs. “It was *Zora* and-uh-I’m- Yeah, I’m alright like, physically- it’s just...” Giovanni did not want to talk about his fears. Not when he was so tired. Especially not to resident Miss Cop Mom. Molly *maybe* but not her. Not yet.

“You were afraid? Hurting mentally instead of physically?” Percy tilted her head in that minute way that always got her results. Giovanni didn't mean to, but Percy put her hands up slightly when he glared at her.

“If you don’t want to talk about it, we don’t have to continue this. I just want you to be fully aware that I am here for that at any time you are.” She reached out her hand and put it loosely on his shoulder. He didn’t shake it off.

Giovanni sighed, that action did make her back off a little bit. He rubbed his arm. “You’re kinda being- too much right now. And that’s coming from *me.* ”

“Yes it is.”

Giovanni rubbed his head a little bit. “I *mean* ...can I just *be alone* right now? Clear my head, shake it off?” He tapped the side of his head, trying to get his point across.

“I get the message. I will be downstairs helping with dinner.”

“Dangerous combo.” Giovanni couldn’t help but snark. “Ha. Ha.” Percy pretended to laugh, standing up. She started to take her leave, but paused.

She reached over Giovanni’s desk and grabbed his small music player. Old earbuds fixed with old tape wrapped around it haphazardly and he refused to let her replace it.

“Heads up.” She said, tossing it to him. Giovanni caught it, and looked at it thankfully.

“I hope you’ll take it easy until you feel better, Giovanni.” She fully opened the door, and Giovanni tuned her out, thinking she was done.

“Oh- That’s right!” She turned around, pointing upwards. “Indus wanted someone to extend an apology towards you about the Christmas Ornaments in the closet. And I feel like he would like to know if you’d still enjoy eating chili for dinner, or would you like something easier? Something better for a stressed emotional state?”

Giovanni raised an eyebrow at her, because there were no Christmas Ornaments in the closet as far as he could tell.

“Uh...that's fine...is he still making cornbread?”

“I believe so.”

“Then I’m down.” He gave Percy finger guns before unwinding the earbuds from the device. Percy slowly returned the gesture, with a short “pew pew.” She shut the door behind it, sensitive as to not make a loud noise.

Giovanni sighed once more, put in the earbuds and turned the music on. He laid back. He felt like Percy was being overbearing but...his heart did feel a lot calmer. His eyes felt less heavy.

He was fine, now.

And very excited for comfort food after all that.

Percy went to make her way backstairs, but spotted Howie at the bottom of the stairs making his own way to the front door. She hummed wondering where he was heading off to.

CRASH!

“Oops- Sorry Miss Molly! I will clean these mischievous vegetables off of the floor before the 5 seconds pass!!”

Percy ignored Howie’s stomping to dash to the kitchen before this crime against food safety could be committed.

Zora walked aimlessly, whistling to herself. She was taking a simple walk through the forest near their home, absent-mindingly spinning her gun around. She enjoyed the sound of it clicking around as she spun, caught and rattled it.

After a bit of walking, she couldn’t shake this strange feeling. She put her gun back in the holster and thought.

“I’m totally forgettin’ about somethin’, ain’t I?” She thought aloud while crossing her arms, tapping her foot.

“Eh, if I forgot it, it probably wasn’t *that* important, now was it?” She shrugged, but before she could take another step she felt something grab behind her neck.

“Aghk-!” She yelped when she was spun around to Howie’s angry eye. He held her by the arms, pinned her against a tree and spoke low and deep.

“Zora Salazar: If I catch you pranking that boy like that again. **I *will* rip your throat out.”** He spoke almost *calmly* directly to her face. **“Am. I. Clear.”** There was no room for debate.

“Ahhh- Ah-huh- Yeahhh lets- How about let's *not* do that.”

“Good. Don’t make me have to.” Howie let her go and started to walk away. “You can bet on it being *quick work.* ”

Howie didn’t bother to turn back to make the threat clear. He knew it was.

He had honey and cornbread to enjoy back at the house, after all. Didn't want to keep anyone waiting hungry.

It seemed like keeping the kids in the house safe was one of his jobs and he intended to *do it.*

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